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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ROME 003608

SIPDIS

STATE PASS USDA FOR FAS/FAA/SBLEGGI
FAS/CMP/DLP/RWENTZEL;

CMP/GFD/RIEMENSCHNEIDER; CMP/COT/LBLUM
ITP/EAMED/MACKE/YOUNG
FSIS/SSTRATMOEN
OFSTS/RICHEY/APHIS/ATORRES
STATE PASS USTR
BRUSSELS ALSO FOR USEU
GENEVA FOR USTR, ALSO AGRICULTURE
MILAN FOR PRINCIPAL OFFICE
FLORENCE FOR PRINCIPAL OFFICER
NAPLES FOR PRINCIPAL OFFICER

E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: WOMAN DIES OF MAD COW IN ITALY

REF: ROME 05917 DECEMBER 2002

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1. SUMMARY: MAD COW DISEASE RETURNED TO ITALIAN NEWSPAPERS WITH THE DEATH OF A YOUNG SICILIAN WOMAN WHO SUCCUMBED TO VARIANT CREUTZFELDT-JAKOB DISEASE (VCJD) AUGUST 6. THIS IS ITALY'S FIRST CONFIRMED DEATH FROM THE DISEASE. STATEMENTS FROM CONFIRMED DEATH FROM THE DISEASE. STATEMENTS FROM THE ITALIAN MINISTER OF HEALTH GIROLAMO SIRCHIA WERE MEANT TO CONVEY CONDOLENCES TO THE FAMILY, TO CALM FEARS ABOUT ITALIAN MEAT CONSUMPTION, AND TO DEFEND THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH'S ROLE IN SAFEGUARDING THE ITALIAN MEAT SUPPLY FROM POSSIBLE CRITICISM.

2. THE HUMAN DISEASE VCJD IS LINKED TO THE CONSUMPTION OF BEEF FROM A BSE-POSITIVE ANIMAL. ALL NEWSPAPER ACCOUNTS REPORTED ON A GOI MINHEALTH STATEMENT LINKING THE CASE TO IMPORTED MEAT OR MEAT FROM AN INFECTED COUNTRY. HOWEVER, THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH DISAVOWS THAT MINISTER SIRCHIA MADE THIS STATEMENT. PENDING THE RESULTS OF AN AUTOPSY, THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH HAS NO OFFICIAL STATEMENT. COMMENT: ITALY IS A NET IMPORTER OF BEEF. ANYONE WHO EATS BEEF IN ITALY IS LIKELY TO EAT IMPORTED BEEF. PRESS REPORTS ALSO CONTAINED VARIOUS SPECULATIVE STATEMENTS ON THE POSSIBLE SOURCE OF THE DISEASE, INCLUDING TRAVEL TO FRANCE. NO ONE CAN KNOW PRECISELY AT WHAT POINT THE ITALIAN WOMAN'S INFECTION BEGAN. END COMMENT.

3. THE FIRST CONFIRMED CASE OF THE ANIMAL DISEASE BOVINE SPONGIFORM ENCEPHALOPATHY, BSE, WAS IDENTIFIED IN THE UK IN NOVEMBER 1986. PRIOR TO A BAN ON EXPORT OF ENGLISH BEEF ENACTED IN MARCH 1996, ITALY AND MANY OTHER COUNTRIES PURCHASED CATTLE AND BEEF FROM THE UK. ITALY'S MAIN BEEF CATTLE SOURCES ARE CURRENTLY FRANCE, GERMANY, AND DENMARK. LITTLE IS KNOWN ABOUT THE INCUBATION PERIOD BETWEEN EXPOSURE TO THE INFECTIVE AGENT AND THE EMERGENCE OF SYMPTOMS IN HUMANS. THERE ARE MANY INFORMATIVE WEBSITES ON BSE AND VCJD INCLUDING THE U.S. [HTTP://WWW.CDC.QOV](http://www.cdc.gov), THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE [HTTP://WWW.FSIS.USDA.QOV/OA/TOPICS/BS](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/oa/topics/bs) E AND THE UNITED KINGDOM'S DEPARTMENT FOR ENVIRONMENT FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS [HTTP://WWW.DEFRA.UK](http://www.defra.uk) . THE UNITED KINGDOM CJD SURVEILLANCE UNIT HAS CLINICAL EXPERIENCE WITH ONE HUNDRED HUMAN CASES AND REPORTS ON THESE AT [HTTP://WWW.CJD.ED.AC.UK](http://www.cjd.ed.ac.uk)

4. IN ITALY TESTS FOR BSE ARE NOW ROUTINELY DONE ON BEEF CATTLE FOR

SLAUGHTER FOR ALL ANIMALS OVER THE
AGE OF 30 MONTHS. THIS REQUIREMENT
BEGAN IN JANUARY 2001. THE GOI
MINHEALTH PRESENTS THESE TESTS AS
EVIDENCE THAT ANIMAL CASES HAVE
PEAKED AND ARE NOW IN DECLINE. IN

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AND REMOVED FROM
THE FOOD AND FEED CHAIN. THE
INCIDENCE OF HUMAN CASES DOES NOT
TRACK ON THE SAME TIMELINE AS ANIMAL
CASES BECAUSE THE INCUBATION PERIOD
OF VCJD CAN EXCEED A DECADE. IN
ADDITION, IN ITALY SLAUGHTER
OCCURRING OUTSIDE LEGAL PROCEDURES IS
UNTESTED. CONSEQUENTLY, TESTING AND
THE RESULTS OF TESTS ARE AN
INCOMPLETE PICTURE OF ALL BEEF IN
COMMERCIAL CHANNELS IN ITALY. SEMBLER

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